THE METHODISTS ON

sumatra

THE METHODISTS

CUTTING A NEW GROOVE IN A RUBBER TREE ON SUMATRA TO START THE FLOW OF LATEX

ON Sumatra

A man on board a ship once asked a much-travelled Englishman where he could find some "raw heathen."

"Well," replied the man, "don't go to the Fiji Islands."

"And why not?" returned the questioner. "When I was a child I saw some pictures of Fiji Islanders and they looked like terrible people."

"It's true that they used to be pretty good heathen," said the Englishman, "but the blankety-blank missionaries have gone there and ruined them."

"Then where may I find some raw heathen?" the inquirer persisted.

"Go to Sumatra," the British oracle returned, "and hunt up a tribe called the Bataks. There you'll find some real heathen."

So the searcher sailed to the great island of Sumatra and penetrated to the villages of the Batak tribe. And when he arrived he found half a million Christians worshipping God in a thousand churches.

The blankety-blank missionaries had already found the Bataks and had ruined them also!

The Batak church on Sumatra is one of the marvels of Christian missions. It was created by the preaching of German missionaries and it embraces at least a third of the Toba Bataks. There are three main groups among the Bataks, speaking different dialects. They are the Toba, the Angkola, and the Karo. The Angkolas are largely Moslems and the Karos are largely animists.

But the Toba Bataks are not the only Christians on Sumatra. The Methodists are there also.

AMONG THE NORTHERN BATAKS THE DEATH DANCE IS SUPPOSED TO SCARE AWAY EVIL SPIRITS

A BIOLOGY CLASS IN THE METHODIST SCHOOL AT MEDAN

Sumatra

Sumatra is the second largest island of the Netherlands East Indies, and the fifth largest in the world. It is fourteen times as large as its mother country, Holland. One thousand miles long and with a maximum width of two hundred and fifty miles, its area is over one hundred and sixty thousand square miles, including its small outlying islands.

A GROUP OF SCHOOL GIRLS ON SUMATRA

BATAK VILLAGES ON SUMATRA ARE OFTEN ON LITTLE WOODED ISLANDS IN THE RICE FIELDS

Sumatra lies across the Equator in the Indian Ocean. Northward is the Malay Peninsula, which juts down from Burma and Siam. Eastward are Java, Borneo and the Celebes. Since the war this whole area, which was desperately fought over, has been the scene of turmoil and rebellion, as a result of which an understanding was reached for the incorporation of Sumatra, Java and some adjacent areas

into an Indonesian Republic, independent of the rule of Holland.

On the island live around seven and a half million people. Among them, as everywhere in that vast area of the world, considerable diversity exists. The Chinese are very numerous. They, along with the Tamils from South India and the Arabs, make up the greater part of the non-Malay population. The natives belong to various tribes.

The majority of the people are Malays, and these are largely Mohammedans, as are the Arabs; many make the pilgrimage to Mecca, and where Christianity is not aggressive Islam spreads among the tribes which until recent times were animistic. The Bataks of the central belt, now so largely Christian, were rather fiercely cannibalistic until sixty or seventy years ago, but they have during the last five decades shown remarkable response to Christianity.

Government schools provide elementary vernacular education, and also "Western education," or education using the Dutch language. In some cases, subsidies are made to mission and private schools. There are numerous "wild schools" conducted by local groups or organizations; many of these are below standard, and in some places they compete with each other to such an extent that they cannot become efficient.

Christian Origins

The first American missionaries to Sumatra were a Mr. Lymann and a Mr. Munson, representatives of the Congregational Church from Boston. They arrived in Sibolga, west Sumatra, in 1834. They began the study of the Batak language and after some months decided to make a visit to the sacred Lake Toba in the center of Batak Land. After three days walking through the mountains they were ambushed, killed and eaten by the Bataks.

Today a church in the village of Lubapining near the spot where these men were killed has on its mem-

bership roll the descendents of the natives who killed the missionaries.

The work of the German missionaries among the Bataks began in 1857, when the surviving members of the Basel Mission in Borneo were transferred to Sumatra. An uprising had taken place earlier in South Borneo, resulting in the death of several of the German missionaries of that society. The Dutch Government, fearing further trouble, refused them permission to reopen the work in Borneo, but did permit them to transfer their efforts to west Sumatra. It remained for Ludwick Nommensen, the outstanding leader in the Rhenish Mission, really to begin the work among the Bataks when, in 1862, he penetrated to the heart of Toba Batak Land and began his ministry there.

Success was phenomenal. By 1911 the Toba Batak Church had around 112,000 baptized members. By 1939 there were nearly half a million, though not all of these were full communicants.

Methodist Beginnings

In 1897 Dr. Benjamin West, a Methodist missionary of Penang, on the Malay Peninsula, who had previously visited Borneo and had played a part in early Methodism in Sarawak on that island, visited Sumatra and was well received by both Chinese and Malays. But he organized no work, for when Rev. George F. Pykett went to Medan, North Sumatra's principal town, in 1904 he found no Protestants and very little Roman Catholic activity among the Asians in the region.

Methodism really began in connection with a Chinese English school at Medan, which was under the direction of Mr. Hong Teen, a non-Christian Chinese who had once been a student at the Methodist Anglo-Chinese School at Penang on the peninsula. He asked Mr. Pykett for a school manager, and with the understanding that there should be Chris-

STRAIT OF
BALAWAN
BINDJEI
TEBING TINGG
MEDAN
KISARAN
BRASTAGI
TANDJONG
SIANTAR
BALAI
BAGAN SI API API
RANTAU
PRAPAT
INDIAN OCEAN
sumatra
SHOWING SOME MAIN

TRS OF METHODIST WORK

tian teaching Mr. Pykett sent a Tamil, Mr. Solomon S. Pakianathan, to take charge in 1905.

This Tamil Christian preached in the Malay language and started church services for the Chinese. The Medan school was soon closed, however, and Mr. Pakianathan in 1908 went to Palembang in South Sumatra, where he opened an English School and a night school for Arabs.

In 1910 a school and church were opened at Medan by two Chinese Methodists from Java. Finally, in 1912, Rev. William T. Ward was sent to Medan as a missionary and thereafter the development of the work among the Chinese was continuous and rapid.

Methodist Bataks

As above pointed out, the German Rhenish Missionary Society began working in 1862 among the cannibalistic Bataks in the mountains around Lake Toba, and from this work there developed the notable Batak church.

But the Bataks of the Lowlands, in the jungles of Asahan, remained untouched. In this region the Methodists were working, and in 1921 they resolved to make an approach to the tribesmen. A Batak from the Methodist Training School in Java was sent to Asahan. In 1922 Rev. and Mrs. Newton T. Gottschall established themselves at Kisaran, within access of the Asahan jungle, to further the Batak work.

Since that time there has been a flourishing Methodist mission among the Bataks in the Sultanate of Asahan. Kisaran is one of the important stations.

Missionaries to Borneo

The Methodist Batak work in Asahan included not only the work among the jungle Bataks, who are known as the Simaloengan Bataks, but also work among the large number of Toba Bataks who had moved down from the Batak highlands to find employment on the large tobacco and rubber estates on the East Coast of Sumatra and in the growing

industrial centers. Many of them had already become Christians in their home land.

In 1919 Rev. and Mrs. Mark Freeman went to Palembang, the first Methodist missionaries to be stationed there. Two years later Miss Mary E. Howell, a nurse, began there a medical work which soon became self-supporting.

The first Sumatra missionary of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society was Miss Freda Chadwick. She reached the island in 1928, after previous service on Java, and opened her work at Medan.

The Methodist Bataks of Sumatra have themselves shown a missionary spirit and have made an important contribution to Methodist work among the Dyaks of Sarawak on the nearby island of Borneo.

Soon after Mr. and Mrs. Paul H. Schmucker were appointed to open the work among the Dyaks in the neighborhood of Kapit in 1938 it was evident that he would need some assistance in extending the work of the schools and the churches. Thus Bishop Lee transferred one of the Batak pastors, Mr. Lucius Simamoera, with his family, from Sumatra to Sarawak. He quickly learned the Dyak language and contributed greatly in building good will among the Dyak chieftans for the mission program.

During the period of the Japanese occupation Lucius and his family remained with the Dyaks, though on one or two occasions he came near losing his head to strange Dyak head hunters from over the mountains. The intervention of friendly Dyaks saved him.

A second Batak preacher and his family, Mr. and Mrs. Djaleb Manoeroeng, were transferred from Sumatra to Sarawak in 1948 to help meet the growing needs of the work.

The Chinese Church

The most substantial section of the Methodist work on Sumatra is the church among the Chinese

LEFT: BATAK HOUSES NEAR LAKE TOBA IN SUMATRA

INDONESIAN GIRLS CARRYING OFFERINGS FOR THE NATIVE TEMPLES, AN INTERESTING EXAMPLE OF PERFECT BALANCE

population. Here it began, and here it has flourished, although it has not neglected the tribal elements among the people.

The Chinese work extends from Pandekalan Brandan on the north to Bengkalis on the eastern coast almost opposite the great city of Singapore on the Malay Peninsula. In some of the port cities large congregations have been developed.

One of the outstanding Chinese churches is that which has been built up in Bagan Si Api Api, about two hundred miles south of Medan. The city has a population of around fourteen thousand and has been called the second largest fishing center in the world, being surpassed only by Bergen, Norway, in the tonnage of fish exported. The Methodists began

ABOVE THE NATIVE LAW COURT AT ARNHEMIA NEAR MEDAN, SUMATRA

RIGHT A NEW VILLAGE BATAK METHODIST CHURCH, ASAHAN SUMATRA DEDICATED IN 1949

their work among the Chinese there in 1924, and they have developed a thriving church, the largest Christian school in the city, and a considerable Christian community.

Practically all of the houses of worship used by the Chinese congregations have been built with funds provided locally by the Chinese themselves, the church at Medan being the only exception.

The War

Japan declared war on Holland on January 11, 1942, and invaded the Netherlands East Indies on the same day. Early in March the capital of the Dutch colonial empire in the Pacific, Batavia, on the island of Java, was captured, and late in the same

month Sumatra also was taken by the Japanese. Thenceforth the whole area was under enemy occupation. The picture on Sumatra was a replica of that on the Malay Peninsula, Borneo and elsewhere. Schools were closed, property was destroyed or damaged, congregations were broken up and scattered and many church leaders and members were driven from their homes and killed.

During the period of Japanese occupation two Methodist missionary families in Sumatra remained at their posts: the Ostroms and the Alms. They were Swedish citizens and thus neutrals. The Japanese allowed them a reasonable amount of liberty during the early part of the war, but during the last year of the conflict they were not permitted to travel over their districts. Mr. Ostrom was in charge of the Chinese work in the East Coast Province. After the liberation he was killed in Tebing Tinggi by a band of Indonesian radicals while he was serving as a representative of the Red Cross. Mr. and Mrs. Alm lived in Kisaran. He had oversight of the Batak work on the East Coast.

After the War

Even when the Japanese surrendered, there was no peace in Indonesia. There were political disturbances everywhere, and independence from Dutch rule was demanded by considerable elements of the population. Civil war broke out, and the conflicts between the rebels and the Dutch army, and between opposing Indonesian groups that were fighting each other, added to the confusion and suffering.

As these disturbances quieted down, the Methodists on Sumatra began to reorganize their schools and churches and rehabilitate their scattered congregations. Progress in this regard was slower than the similar work on the Malay Peninsula and in Sarawak.

But the Sumatra Methodists struggled to their feet and the work of the church went forward.

Sumatra Methodism

There have been various changes in the organizational structure of Sumatra Methodism. In the beginning it was a part of the mission on the Malay Peninsula, but in 1922 North Sumatra became a separate mission, and in 1925 the North Sumatra Mission Conference was organized.

Two years later, as a result of the depression, the Methodists withdrew from Java in order to concentrate on Sumatra, and in 1929 the Netherlands Indies Mission Conference and the North Sumatra Mission Conference were united to form the Sumatra Mission Conference.

At the present time there is a Sumatra Provisional Annual Conference. It is in the Singapore Area, and with the work on the Malay Peninsula and in Sarawak it is included in the Southeastern Asia Provisional Central Conference.

The principal mission stations are at Medan, Palembang, Rantau Prapat, Tebing Tinggi, and Kisaran. Before the war missionaries were in residence at each of these places, and soon thereafter they were returned to all the residences save those at Rantau Prapat and Kisaran, which were not occupied promptly.

There is a Methodist school for boys and girls at Medan and a similar school at Palembang. Each of these has an enrollment of one thousand or more students. The Methodist Dutch-Native School is at Rantau Prapat. Methodist English Schools are located at Tebing Tinggi, Siantar, and Bindjie, and there are numerous village schools for boys and girls conducted in the Batak and Malay languages. A book store is maintained in Medan.

Due to the Indonenian disturbances, church statistics can be stated only in approximate terms. It may be said that Methodism on Sumatra has around sixty congregations, three thousand members, thirty church buildings with parsonages, and forty ordained and local preachers.

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